

The Concentrator

By

Gabe Wollenburg

Kevin sighed as he sat down at his desk and a little bit of hot tea spilled onto his fingers, burning them a bit. It was one of the many frustrations of life, hot tea. Tea must be piping hot to be brewed properly, but in the same breath, piping hot tea is a great danger to all those around it-- especially those who were less than careful with their beverages, like Kevin.

Kevin was less than careful with a lot of things. Little things, that, if Kevin spent only a moment's more consideration with, would be a lot less frustrating for him. And it annoyed him that he knew this.

For example. At Kevin's feet were the dried coffee grounds that he'd spilled from his garbage can (conveniently located off his left hand at his work desk). He'd spilled the grounds rummaging through the garbage can looking for a receipt from the department store where he'd purchased an electronic music player that didn't

work. Well, it worked-- but not to Kevin's satisfaction. That happened sometimes to Kevin.

Kevin's teeth hurt in the evening times. He had a way of holding them when he was concentrating that was bad for him, from an orthodontic standpoint. What was bad for his mouth was probably was pretty good for his feet, however, considering in his youth, Kevin would rock on the outside of his feet and stand with most of his weight on his ankles when he was concentrating.

Kevin was a concentrator. He focused on things, just not always the right things. He bounced from idea to idea, usually looking deeply into the profound ramifications that the idea was likely to have on his immediate experience, and rarely looking deeper than that.

Kevin had lots of friends-- but he didn't really go out of his way to see them. He much preferred that they came to him.

Kevin was, at that moment, trying to sop up the spilled tea from his desktop with his arm, never thinking for a second that first of all, his bare arm was not well suited for sopping, but also, there was a pile of dirty socks at his feet that would have sopped up the tea nicely. Or, there was a stack of neatly folded dishcloths in his linen closet in the next room.

Kevin wasn't thinking about any of that, because he was in a hurry to get to his computer. Kevin needed to write.

He'd seen a sickly looking boy at a bus stop earlier that day. He wanted to write about it in his journal because he was sure that if he didn't do it right away, he'd forget to write it down, and he didn't want that to happen. Kevin was sure that the boy was important. He wasn't sure why.

Sitting at his desk, Kevin tuned out the pool of cold tea that his left forearm was sitting in, ignored the muted thumping coming from his hip-hop loving neighbor in the flat above his. He ignored the entire collection of desk familiars he kept piled around his pc. Familiars like A pair of citronella candles shaped like an Easter Island head. The incessant blinking lights of his routers and cable modem. A pile over slightly overdue but not into collections medical bills. A stuffed cartoon monkey. A beanie babie shaped like a squid. A marshmallow peep from two Easter's ago. A stack of mouse pads pilfered from his previous employer. These are all the things that surrounded Kevin as he stat down at his computer, fired up his journal, and started to write about the boy he'd seen earlier that day.

Upon opening the program, faced with the flickering white blank slate of the journal entry body field, Kevin instantly and immediately forgot what he was doing, slid his hands over to his mouse and clicked up his internet browser, his recently renewed desire to start living like the kind of writer he believed he should be forgotten as quickly as the coffee grounds at his feet.

"It sounds to me like you're depressed," flashed a message popping up at the bottom of his screen. It was his girlfriend Kylie. His exgirlfirned. Sending him a text message. Fueling his distraction. Again. Kevin smiled. She was always online at this time, she had a full two hours left of work and, with any luck, and he'd have most of those hours to converse with her via instant messages. Each message would come into his computer in the same way random thoughts came into his brain; they bounced from the outside world into his conscious here and now. They kept him from getting the things he wanted to get done accomplished, if only he had been aware of his desire to get those things done in the first place.

And so the conversation began.

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